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PROGRAM NBC Nightly News

STATION WRC-TV
NBC Network

DATE March 31, 1983 7:00 P.M. CITY Washington, D.C.

SUBJECT Guerrillas Fighting in El Salvador

TOM BROKAW: Guerrillas fighting in El Salvador are claiming a major victory tonight. They say they killed more than 70, perhaps as many as 84, government soldiers northeast of San Salvador today. Many of the government troops were said to be part of elite units trained by the United States.

The El Salvador Government will only say that there was heavy fighting in that area.

Nicaragua's Government officials claim today that their army beat back an attempt by right-wing rebels to establish a stronghold along the Atlantic Ocean.

As George Lewis reports tonight, the Nicaraguan Government also is on guard all along its border with Honduras.

GEORGE LEWIS: Nicaragua's border with Honduras. Nicaraguan troops on alert because the government claims that a huge U.S.-supported invasion force is massed on the other side.

Journalists who've been to both sides have found no signs of an imminent invasion. But throughout Nicaragua, posters urge the people to be on guard. TV announcements give local militias brief lessons in weapons training.

Today, at a news conference, the Nicaraguan Defense Minister claimed that 2000 invaders had been pushed back into Honduras in the last two days, that remnants of an earlier invasion force were scattered. But Nicaraguan authorities have been reluctant to take outside observers to the scene of any reported big battles.

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Nicaraguan militiamen did take us to the scene of a small battle, where two days ago right-wing guerrillas, known as Contras, had burned down a coffee warehouse. Yesterday, in the same area, three Nicaraguan militiamen were killed by guerrilla mortar fire and one man was wounded. The Contras got away.

The government troops say that by mounting attacks like this, the Contras, the counterrevolutionaries, are trying to further erode the already crippled economy of Nicaragua.

All their vigilance has been costly for the Nicaraguans: more money for arms, less for consumer goods, empty supermarket shelves, gas lines in the middle of a worldwide oil glut, and the continuing cost in human lives.